

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 538

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINT, PINR
SUBJECT: RUMORS ABOUT BREZHNEV

REF: LENINGRAD 0020 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: RUMORS CONTINUE TO BUZZ AROUND THE MOSCOW DIPLOMATIC CIRCUIT ABOUT BREZHNEV'S PHYSICAL AND POLITICAL HEALTH. ONE OF CONGEN LENINGRAD'S UNOFFICIAL SOVIET SOURCES HAS PASSED ALONG AN INTRIGUING REPORT OF A FORTHCOMING MEETING BETWEEN USTINOV AND ROMANOV IN LENINGRAD DURING WHICH ROMANOV SUPPOSEDLY WILL SEEK USTINOV'S SUPPORT IN SOME UNSPECIFIED LEADERSHIP MENEUVER. WHILE THE CREDIBILITY OF THE REPORT IS DUBIOUS, IT IS INTERESTING AS A POSSIBLE INDICATOR OF SPECULATION AMONG THE SOVIET INTELLIGENTSIA ABOUT INTRIGUES WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

1. THE UNCERTAIN STATUS OF BREZHNEV'S PHYSICAL HEALTH PREDICTABLY HAS GENERATED RUMORS THAT HE MAY BE IN POLITICAL DIFFICULTY. IN PARTICULAR, THE ITALIAN EMBASSY TELLS US OF PERSISTENT RUMOR FROM ITALY, REPORTEDLY ORIGINATING WITH THE PCI, THAT LEONID IL'ICH IS IN POLITICAL TROUBLE. THE ITALIAN EMBASSY,
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AS WELL AS ITALIAN JOURNALISTS HERE, ARE UNDER PRESSURE TO SHED LIGHT ON THE RUMOR AND IN THE PROCESS ARE STIRRING UP SPECULATION ON THE COCKTAIL CIRCUIT ABOUT BREZHNEV'S POLITICAL STANDING. TO DATE WE HAVE SEEN NOTHING THAT WOULD SUBSTANTIATE THIS RUMOR.

2. CONGEN LENINGRAD'S SOURCE IS CONNECTED WITH THE

REPIN INSTITUTE AND IN THE PAST HAS PROVIDED USUALLY RELIABLE INFORMATION ON THE MILITARY SITUATION, ALTHOUGH THE CONGEN DOES NOT KNOW WHAT HIS SPECIFIC MILITARY CONNECTIONS MAY BE. ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE: THERE WILL BE TOP SECRET MILITARY "STAFF INDOCTRINATION" (SHTABNOE UCHENIE) AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY ON CHORNAYA RECHKA, WHICH IS LOCATED IN THE SMOLENKA PART OF VASILEVSKIY ISLAND, TOWARD THE END OF JANUARY. SOURCE SAID THAT NO ONE KNOWS THE EXACT TECHNICAL SUBJECT MATTER OF THE MEETING, BUT HE DESCRIBED IT AS A "COMMAND GAME" (KOMMANDNAYA IGRA) WITH THE PROCEEDINGS TO BE ENTIRELY ORAL. ALL OFFICERS AND CADETS OF THE ACADEMY WERE REPORTEDLY GIVEN LEAVE FOR JANUARY TO ENSURE THAT NO ONE IS AT THE ACADEMY AT THE TIME OF THE EXERCISE. DEFENSE MINISTER USTINOV REPORTEDLY WILL ATTEND THE PROCEEDINGS.

3. IN CONNECTION WITH THIS EXERCISE, SOURCE REPORTS THAT THERE WILL BE A MEETING BETWEEN USTINOV AND ROMANOV, REALLY AIMED AT FORGING A POLITICAL ALIGNMENT ON A LENINGRAD BASE IN CONNECTION WITH BREZHNEV'S INCREASING DISABILITY AND ROMANOV'S DESIRE FOR POLITICAL "TURNOVER". TO UNDERSCORE THE LENINGRAD CHARACTER OF THE ALLEGED ALIGNMENT, SOURCE NOTED THAT USTINOV IS FORMER LOCAL PARTY CHIEF ANDREI ZHDANOV'S SON-IN-LAW. SOURCE FEELS THIS MEETING BETWEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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USTINOV AND ROMANOV IS THE ENTIRE PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE, WHICH HE REGARDS AS LITTLE MORE THAN AN EFFORT TO ARRANGE MILITARY SUPPORT, OR AT LEAST NEUTRALITY, FOR WHATEVER INTRIGUE ROMANOV HAS IN MIND. AT ONE POINT, SOURCE REMARKED ON THE MILITARY ASPECT OF THE MEETING TO THE EFFECT THAT THIS IS MERELY A PRETEXT TO COVER ITS REAL POLITICAL PURPOSE.

4. PARTY SECRETARY M.A. SUSLOV, WHOM ROMANOV IS SAID BY SOURCE TO SUPPORT, IS A LIKELY THIRD MEMBER IN THIS ROMANOV GROUPING ACCORDING TO HIS ANALYSIS, WITH KGB CHAIRMAN ANDROPOV SAID TO BE ANOTHER POSSIBLE ALLY. UKRAINIAN FIRST PARTY SECRETARY SHCHERBITSKIY IS CAST HERE AS THE MAIN RIVAL. ROMANOV IS HELD TO BE THE KEY FIGURE, HOWEVER, SINCE USTINOV IS CHARACTERIZED AS BEING ONLY AN OLD BUREAUCRAT AND TECHNOCRAT WHILE SUSLOV IS GIVEN HIS USUAL ROLE AS IDEOLOGIST AND KING MAKER. SOURCE COULD NOT SAY WHAT ULTIMATE PURPOSE THIS ALIGNMENT IS TO SERVE, BUT HE HINTED STRONGLY THAT IT IS AIMED AT BIGGER AND BETTER THINGS FOR ROMANOV. HE THINKS THAT BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY LINES WOULD BE "TOUGH" UNDER SUCH

A GROUPING BUT THAT JEWISH EMIGRATION WOULD CONTINUE IF ONLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF GETTING RID FOR TROUBLESOME ELEMENTS.

5. SOURCE ADDED THAT SURVEILLANCE IS LIKELY TO INCREASE IN CONNECTION WITH THIS MEETING AND EMPHASIZED THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR CORRESPONDENTS TO BE IN LENINGRAD SINCE HE SEEMED TO FEEL THEIR PRESENCE WOULD MAKE THE REALIZATION OF THIS ALLIANCE LESS LIKELY.

6. COMMENT: WE FIND THE ABOVE LENINGRAD RUMOR INTERESTING PRIMARILY AS INDICATING THAT LEADERSHIP POLITICS ARE THE SUBJECT OF SPECULATION AMONG SOVIET CONFIDENTIAL

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INTELLIGENTSIA. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT ROMANOV WOULD COOK UP A MILITARY HEADQUARTERS EXERCISE IN LENINGRAD PRIMARILY AS A COVER FOR SEEKING USTINOV'S POLITICAL SUPPORT; WE WOULD GUESS THAT CONGEN'S SOURCE HEARD RUMOR OF USTINOV'S LIKELY PARTICIPATION IN LENINGRAD MILITARY EXERCISE AND LIKELY MEETING WITH ROMANOV, AND ADDED PERSONAL SPECULATION ABOUT ROMANOV'S POLITICAL MACHINATIONS.
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